

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 99 NO. 2 SPRING 2014



MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY MONITORING BIRDS

BY ILANA DEBARE

The morning joggers on Alameda's Crown Memorial State Beach have gotten to know Cindy Margulis. "How many did you get today?" they call out when they see her standing with her binoculars.

CONTINUED on page 5

Burrowing Owl at Cesar Chavez Park, Berkeley.
Rick Lewis



LOOKING FORWARD FOR GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

BY LAURA GOBBI

I am so honored to have been elected the new president of Golden Gate Audubon's board of directors, and look forward to working with the board, staff, and members. Like the birds, busy with their nesting season, Golden Gate Audubon is positively bustling with activities and transitions.

First, we are in the midst of our fifth annual Birdathon. It's not too late to participate! Join one of our fun, expert-led trips during April (see page 4), or create your own team. We depend on support from members like you to continue providing

all our birding programs, education efforts, and advocacy.

Second, Golden Gate Audubon staff and volunteers continue to work on pressing conservation issues. In San Francisco, we submitted an extensive comment letter supporting reasonable, balanced management of dogs in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. We are also working to build support for San Francisco's Natural Areas Program in an effort to protect the city's last precious patches of wildlife habitat.

In the East Bay, we started working this past winter with the East Bay Regional Park District to monitor and protect a small population of Western Snowy Plovers found roosting at Crown Memorial State Beach in Alameda. Our East Bay Conservation Committee recently issued a thoughtful and articulate policy statement opposing illuminated billboards near the Bay Bridge, which contribute to light pollution and can harm birds.

Third, Golden Gate Audubon staff is changing too. We say hello to our new office manager, Benjamin Sisson, and goodbye to Mike Lynes, who joined Golden Gate Audubon as its conservation director in 2008 and became the executive director 16 months ago. Mike has joined Audubon California as its new director of public policy, where he will continue much of his Golden Gate Audubon work on a larger scale, such as minimizing the harm to birds from renewable energy projects.

The search for a new executive director is in full swing and may even be complete by the time you read this. We are excited by the candidates who have already applied and are confident we will find a good fit. We will keep you informed about the search through our blog, website, and Facebook.

Thank you for the warm welcome as the new board president, and for your continuing support for Golden Gate Audubon. I look forward to meeting you and hearing your ideas for how we can make Golden Gate Audubon even better.

Read about Laura's birding background and vision for Golden Gate Audubon on our blog at <http://tinyurl.com/kqtgsd8>.

NEWS BRIEFS

Lights Out for Birds

Spring migration is here! Keep birds safe and on course by turning off lights at night, especially in large office buildings. Get your workplace onboard. You can download Lights Out fact sheets and flyers to share with co-workers or building managers at goldengateaudubon.org/lightsout.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Final results are in for the 2013 CBC. Our Oakland CBC found 182 species and 105,168 individual birds, with a record-setting 256 field observers. The SF CBC found 184 species and 71,031 individual birds, also setting a record at 144 observers. Details at goldengateaudubon.org/cbc-archives.

Calling All Bird Photographers

We are already thinking about 2015! Share your favorite images with other bird lovers in our next Birds of the Bay Area calendar. Submission deadline is July 1. You can send up to three high-resolution photographs (printable at 300 dpi at nine by twelve inches) of Bay Area birds to idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

Thanks to the League

Golden Gate Audubon extends a big thank-you to the Berkeley League of Women Voters for letting us use the league's meeting room to hold our popular Beginning Birding and Owl classes. It's great to share a building with other dedicated and generous nonprofit organizations like the Berkeley League.



Alan Hopkins

JOHN MCLAREN PARK

BY ALAN HOPKINS

In parts of the park, you feel you're out of the city.

Located near San Francisco's southern border, John McLaren Park is the city's second-largest park. Its 312 acres have well-developed trails that cross rolling hills and provide ample birding opportunities. Unlike Golden Gate Park and the Presidio, McLaren is not overrun with joggers and bicyclists on weekends. Nor is a birding outing likely to be scuttled due to special events and road closures. In parts of the park, it is possible to feel you're out of the city, though great hilltop vistas bring the city into view. You can do a nice loop walk covering all the spots described here by taking the fire road that runs between Visitacion Avenue (across from the middle school) and Mansell Street to John F. Shelly Drive.

McLaren has a number of habitats. Of most interest are the open grassy slopes used by wintering Western Meadowlarks, Say's Phoebes, and American Kestrels—species becoming harder to find in the city as their preferred habitat is developed or planted over. In the

spring, the hills support an array of native wildflowers. The ridgeline along Mansell Street is frequented by local and migrating raptors. The park's northwestern side has been planted with the usual cosmopolitan trees found elsewhere, and the species are similar: Downy Woodpecker, Hutton's Vireo, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, White-crowned Sparrow. Wintering birds are Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers.

The most productive areas are the willow-lined springs and seeps. My favorite is along the boardwalk that runs through the willows between John F. Shelley Drive and McNab Lake. This is a great spot for spring migrants such as Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, and Western Tanager. The lake is worth checking for Hooded Mergansers and other waterbirds passing through. Across Shelley Drive is the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater, which has a nice willow-lined seep and oak trees. This area is heavily used by professional dog walkers, but they are not as common on weekends. Yosemite Marsh, a small pond near Bacon and Oxford Streets, is now a "marsh" in name only, but the alders, oaks, and redwoods are worth scanning for migrant landbirds. John F. Shelley Lake is located along the upper end of Shelley Drive. At this riprap-lined lake, dogs can outnumber the ducks. Around the lake, look for resident Hutton's Vireo and Bewick's Wren as well as migrant landbirds.

For more information, go to sfrecpark.org/destination/john-mclaren-park. A more detailed tour of McLaren Park is at goldengateaudubon.org/blog.



Alan Hopkins

(Left) Green Heron at Yosemite Marsh; (above) Boardwalk through the willows.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

BIRDATHON 2014—A TRUE GROUP EFFORT

BY ILANA DEBARE

Birdathon 2014 is our biggest Birdathon ever—with more trips, more prizes, and more fun features like Birdathon 2014 Burrowing Owl T-shirts.

It's also more of a collaborative effort than ever. A volunteer Birdathon Committee began meeting last fall to organize the event, which takes place throughout April. Having the combined energy of nine people made a huge difference!

The Birdathon Committee dreamed up creative new Birdathon events such as:

- Birding's Big Game—a Cal versus Stanford birding competition
- Behind the Scenes at California Academy of Sciences
- Beginning Bird Photography workshop
- Insider's Guide to Presidio Wildlife

They also reached out more broadly than ever for Birdathon prizes, which will include two-night stays at the Costanoa Resort in Pescadero and the Sierra Hot Springs resort in Sierraville—both great birding locations.

Holly Bern is one Golden Gate Audubon member who was inspired by the array of Birdathon trips. She had never taken part in Birdathon before. She was nervous about fundraising. But then she saw the April 26 trip to view California Condors in Pinnacles National Park. "It's been on my list to go see condors at the Pinnacles," she says. "When I saw this trip, I knew I had to do it."

Holly emailed friends with a heartfelt message about what the condors and Golden Gate Audubon meant to her. Within two days, she had raised more than \$800!

"Rather than just asking people for money, I'm asking them to support something I really believe in," she says. "People said it struck a chord with them."

Holly's efforts are part of the magical math of Birdathon. If 100 members each donate \$50, we would raise \$5,000. But if 100 members raise an average of \$500, we end up with a whopping \$50,000 to support Golden Gate Audubon's conservation and environmental education programs.

Get involved! There's still time to sign up for a trip. Or if you



BIRDATHON 2014 TRIPS

California Academy of Sciences—4/3	Alameda County Big Day—4/13
Birding Boot Camp—4/5	Sonoma County Big Day—4/13
Beginning Bird Photography—4/5	San Francisco Big Day — 4/19
Sonoma Coast "Big Six Hours"—4/5	Las Gallinas Ponds — 4/20
Birding By Ear—4/6	California Condors — 4/26
Oakland "Big Six Hours"—4/6	San Francisco and the Peninsula — 4/26
Tilden Park — 4/11	Altamont Pass—4/26
Presidio Wildlife—4/12	Point Reyes — 4/27
Birding Downtown San Francisco — 4/12	Hayward Shoreline — 4/27
Del Valle Park—4/13	Create Your Own Birdathon Trip — anytime in April
Cal vs. Stanford — 4/13	

can't go on a trip, you can support Birdathon with a tax-deductible contribution. And mark Sunday May 18 on your calendar for the Birdathon Awards Celebration.

To sign up, go to goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2014trips.

Thank you to the Birdathon Committee: Juli Chamberlin, Ilana DeBare, Dan Harris, Lisa Eileen Hern, Chris Okon, Phil Price, Madelyn Stone, Glen Tepke, and Bob Toleno, as well as Carla Din, Alan Harper, Steve Lombardi, and Beth Moseley.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

San Francisco

Saturday, June 21

Save the date for our annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic on Saturday June 21! You share your love of birds all year through GGAS. Now let us share some love with you. East Bay location to be announced—check our website or monthly e-Gull newsletter.

Birdathon Awards Celebration

Oakland

Sunday, May 18

Join our Birdathon Awards Celebration on Sunday, May 18, from 3 to 6 p.m. At a stunning private home in the Oakland Hills, enjoy live jazz, gourmet wine and hors d'oeuvres, and door prizes as we honor Birdathon winners. For more info, see goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2014-party.

David Sibley in the Bay Area

San Francisco

Thursday, April 24

Famed bird artist and field guide author David Allen Sibley will speak at the SF Jewish Community Center on Thursday evening, April 24. GGAS members can get a 25 percent discount on tickets by using the code BIRDING25 and ordering online at <http://bit.ly/jccsfsibley>.

CONTINUED from page 1

Sometimes Margulis gets eleven, sometimes six. On her best day, she got fifteen at one time.

What she's "getting" are Snowy Plovers—tiny, threatened shorebirds that roost along the busy beach, and which she started counting and monitoring this past winter.

Margulis is among a half-dozen Golden Gate Audubon Society volunteers who have been documenting the Alameda plovers' presence and working with park officials to protect them. They're part of a much larger number of GGAS members involved in bird monitoring—citizen-scientists whose careful collection of data is making a difference for Bay Area birds.

Burrowing Owls at the Berkeley Marina. Snowy Plovers in San Francisco and Alameda. Endangered California Least Terns at the old Alameda Naval Air Base. All have benefitted from Golden Gate Audubon monitoring efforts.

"Golden Gate Audubon volunteers collect information about local bird populations that we wouldn't have otherwise," says Mike Lynes, policy director for Audubon California. "Then GGAS shares the data with scientists who track bird populations and use it in advocacy to make this a better area for birds."

These monitoring projects arise from a long Audubon tradition of citizen science, starting with the 114-year-old Christmas Bird Count. Monitoring draws upon



Brown Pelican.

Careful collection of data by citizen-scientists is making a difference for Bay Area birds.

Audubon members' love of birds, expert observational skills, and commitment to science-based conservation.

In San Francisco, GGAS member Matt Zlatunich began monitoring Snowy Plovers at Crissy Field in 2005. Using carefully developed protocols, volunteers focused on how the plovers were affected by recreational activities such as dog walking. Each year, they wrote up a summary of their findings and made recommendations to the National Park Service.

And the NPS responded—installing protective fencing and educational signage during the months that plovers are present.

Meanwhile, Dan Murphy started monitoring Snowy Plovers on Ocean Beach in 2007, after the *Cosco Busan* oil spill. His data has helped build a case for better dog management along the shoreline. Last December and January, for instance, Murphy found that dog owners were in compliance with leash laws less than 30 percent of the time.

"I've used monitoring data a bunch of times in letters to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area," he says.

In Berkeley, Golden Gate Audubon members began monitoring Burrowing Owls at the Berkeley Marina in 2006. Their data helped convince city officials to provide

protective fencing for the owls, including a sculpture that doubles as a barrier. The owl monitoring evolved into a volunteer docent program that has introduced thousands of Berkeley park-goers to the owls and their habitat needs.

"We've reached a point where community members are telling each other, 'Please put your dog on leash, there are owls here,'" says Della Dash, who started the owl program.

In Alameda, Leora Feeney and John Luther launched twice-monthly surveys of birds at the naval base in 2004. In 2008, GGAS volunteers started helping the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with its Tern-Watch monitoring program there.

"We currently have 10 years of data on Brown Pelicans that we are going to share with Brown Pelican biologists," Feeney says.

Down the road at Crown Beach, the Alameda plover volunteers convinced East Bay Regional Park District officials last winter to install informational signs asking beach users not to disturb the plovers.

"These birds don't have a house to go to, and they can't sleep in their car," says Cindy Margulis. "If they are constantly being disturbed, their rest is being degraded. And that will make it harder for them to breed and survive."



Least Tern.

SPEAKER SERIES



Common Yellowthroat.

Scott Whittle

A NEW SYSTEM FOR IDENTIFYING WARBLERS

SCOTT WHITTLE

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, April 17
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Warblers are a favorite of many birders, but they are often a challenge when it comes to identification. In their new, critically acclaimed book *The Warbler Guide*, Scott Whittle and Tom Stephenson tackle this problem and come up with some useful answers. Scott explains important but often overlooked ID points such as overall contrast, subtle facial features, general color impression, feather edging, and behavior. He also presents the guide's revolutionary system for memorizing vocalizations. He shows that once birders have a trained eye and ear, even partial views of a bird can be valuable or diagnostic—and that with the right information every look at a bird can be a good look!

Scott Whittle has 20 years of experience as a professional photographer and educator. He has an MFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts, has held the New York State Big Year record, and has birded throughout the United States. He lives in Cape May, New Jersey.

POLEWALKING: SPECIAL SESSION FOR BIRDERS

On May 10, experience a beautiful coastal birdwalk while learning skills that will improve your balance, endurance, posture, and confidence. With walking poles, you can enhance spine function and reduce knee stress—and ultimately maintain your ability to enjoy the outdoors. Trip leader Jayah Faye Paley (polesformobility.com) teaches pole skills for the East Bay Regional Park District and other organizations. The GGAS walk, held in Pacifica, is free, and Jayah will supply quality poles. For details on time and location, go to Field Trips on the GGAS website.

MYSTERY OF THE MARBLED MURRELET

MARIA MUDD RUTH

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, May 15
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Maria Mudd Ruth shares tales from her book, *Rare Bird: Pursuing the Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet*—part naturalist detective story, part environmental inquiry celebrating this endangered seabird. She highlights the murrelet's fascinating life history, the 185-year-long search for its elusive nest, and its accidental discovery in Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 1974. She describes the challenging work of the biologists in old-growth forests and at sea as well the efforts of Audubon and other groups to protect the murrelet.

Maria Mudd Ruth has published more than a dozen natural history books. She moved her family from Virginia to California in 2001 to be closer to the murrelets. She now lives in Olympia, Washington.



THE FUTURE OF DEEP FOREST OWLS

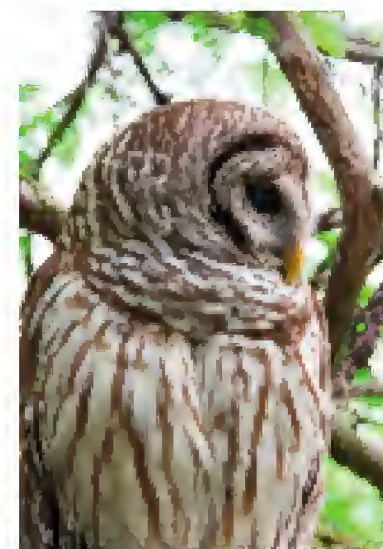
JACK DUMBACHER

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, June 19
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Over the last 50 to 100 years, the eastern Barred Owl has made its way to the western United States, where it now inhabits the range of the endangered Northern Spotted Owl. Evidence suggests that Barred Owls have become a primary threat to Spotted Owls—they are fierce competitors and faster reproducers, and have even been anecdotally reported to kill Spotted Owls. Jack Dumbacher discusses the natural history and conservation concerns for both species and the potential actions proposed by management agencies.

Jack Dumbacher, curator of birds and mammals at the California Academy of Sciences, has been working on California Barred Owls since 2006. He is a member of the GGAS board.



Barred Owl.

Bob Lewis/wingbeats.org

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from December 1, 2013, through February 28, 2014

GOLDEN EAGLE

\$1000 or more

David Anderson, Bei Brown, Andrea Burhoe, Bob Hallet, Helen L. Knopp, Michael Lozeau, Miles and Mel McKey, Kelly Purcell, Karen Rosenbaum, Kuppe G. Shankar, Jacqueline Smalley, Todd Smith

PEREGRINE FALCON

(\$500 to \$999)

Barbara Anderson, Carson Cox, Helen M. Heller, Penn Hughes, Robert & Johanna Mandel, John Nelson, Regina Phelps, Diane Ross-Leech, Anne B. Rowe

LEAST TERN

(\$200 to \$499)

Richard R. Banks, Martin Bern, Marjorie Blackwell, Eileen Cafferty, Carol Donohoe, Jack Dumbacher, Linda L. Eby, Daryl Goldman, Elsa Haubold, Douglas Hendricks, Judith Klinman, Claire Lash, Elaine Lee, Stephen Lombardi, Barbara Loomis & Stephen Elspas, Armida Lucas, Laurence E. Malone, Steven Margolin, Bruce Mast, Dan and Joan Murphy, Audre W. Newman, George Peyton, Steven Rosenberg

CLAPPER RAIL

(\$100 to \$199)

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GIFTS

(Up to \$99)

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MEMORIAL GIFTS

Winifred Ghiglione, in memory of Stan Curletto

IN-KIND GIFTS

Pam Belchamber, Leslie Colon, Jacqueline Craig, Alexandra Koenig, Keith Hanson, Bob Lewis, Brian and Barbara McKown, Ed Pandolfino, Dorothy M Quate, Linda Vallee, Mark R. Welther

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Clorox (Rachel Watson-Clark)
GAP Inc. (Claire Lash)
Hewlett Packard (Patrick Owens)
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PayPal Giving
Pacific Gas & Electric (Diane Ross-Leech and Harriet Sollod)
United Way of the Bay Area (Maureen Torres)

GRANTS

Anonymous Donor, Benevity, Cox Family Fund, East Bay Community Foundation, Fidelity Charitable, Horizons Foundation, JustGive, Kapor Center for Social Impact (Outdoor Afro), Network for Good, Uplands Family Foundation, Waste Solutions Group, Inc.

LASTING GIFTS

Bei Brown made a difference for birds as a Burrowing Owl docent. Although she passed away in 2012, she continues to make a difference—through a gift to Golden Gate Audubon from her estate of \$56,000. GGAS recently received two other generous bequests: \$19,444 from the Helen L. Knopp Trust and \$1,000 from the estate of Todd Crane Smith. Please consider including GGAS in your estate plans. For information, contact ggas@goldengateaudubon.org

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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 The Gull is printed with soy-based inks on chlorine-free paper, 30% postconsumer waste content.

3 Bay Area Hotspot: McLaren Park

Meander the park's hillsides, willow-lined springs, and wooded areas to find wintering birds, migrants, and year-round residents.

4 Birdathon 2014

The annual GGAS fundraiser starts now! Check out the terrific field trips and the prizes you can win.

6 Spring Speaker Series

Coming up, April–June: an innovative warbler guide, the mysterious Marbled Murrelet, and Barred Owl vs Spotted Owl.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bushtits.

BEGUILING BUSHTITS

BY PAM YOUNG

Bushtits are so small, busy, and quick that you might mistake them for an oversized fuzzy, squeaky bug. Yet, they are among our most ubiquitous backyard avian residents. Bushtit populations are on the rise, largely due to an increase in suitable habitat near urban areas. While adults and juveniles have similar brown-gray plumage, females develop light eyes and males keep dark eyes. Packed into the Bushtit's diminutive six grams is a foliage-gleaning whir, which makes observing them both a delight and a challenge.

Bushtits often forage with Oak Titmice and Chestnut-backed Chickadees, but they stand out as the most flock-dependent species. Arthur Cleveland Bent wrote in *Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows and Titmice*: "Bushtits are sociable, friendly little birds, not only toward their human neighbors but among themselves." While

gardening, we are routinely visited by a flock of six to twelve birds that cluster near each other and even near us as they forage through our ceanothus bushes and honeysuckle vines. With their long tails and light body weight, Bushtits can hang upside down from delicate branches and glean insects from the underside of foliage.

Bushtit pairs weave intricate pendulous nests made of spiderwebs, cocoons, moss, lichens, and feathers. As cooperative breeders, they tolerate help from flock members. Alexander Skutch established the concept of nest helpers while studying Bushtits. Despite the participation of flock members, DNA studies revealed that breeding pairs are monogamous. Parents incubate five to seven eggs for about 13 days, and the nestlings fledge in 18 days. Fledglings become independent after two weeks, when they have long tails.

In March 2013, I had a close encounter with a female that repeatedly pecked at our window, apparently vexed by her own reflection. The online *Birds of North America* describes this behavior as "shadow-boxing." Concerned that this distraction took valuable energy from breeding, I covered the window. Northern California populations typically have an excess of females, and perhaps she couldn't find a mate.

This past February, as if on cue, a female approached the window ledge and deftly plucked relict spiderwebs from the corner. She made multiple forays into our camphor tree, where she may have begun a nest. Her presumed mate gathered flower stamens in the nearby camellia and followed her. Was this the shadow-boxing female? Perhaps she returned to show off her new mate!

Pam Young is a retired aviculturist and aspiring master birder, now living in Berkeley

Acknowledgments: Thank you, Alan Kaplan for your reference to BNA's description of "shadow-boxing."